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SCIENCE

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 22, 1902.

THE NATIONAL OBSERVATORY QUESTION
IN ITS LATEST PHASE.

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THE newspapers have announced, we suppose on good authority, that Captain Colby M. Chester, U. S. N., has been selected as Superintendent of the Naval Observatory. It seems from these dispatches that the position is recognized as the most attractive and desirable in the gift of the Navy Department, and is tendered to an officer whose professional abilities and personal character are of so high a class as to render him eminently worthy of the reward. On the old theory that offices are rewards of merit, the action of the Department will doubtless meet general approval. And yet, the abnormality of the situation is such that we hope not to weary our readers if we summarize its principal features.

1. The institution in question is, notwithstanding its name, the national observatory of the United States. It has no rational purpose of existence except a desire on the part of the American people that our nation shall, in its public capacity, do its full share in the promotion of those branches of astronomy which have to be pursued under public auspices. The lead-

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